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# Reluctant Partnership

From Dr Frances Starner, Manila

LATE IN THE AFTERNOON of January 25, some 5,000 members of a left-wing labour "party", an organisation of unemployed and a peasant union, and a number of university students massed not far from the Philippine Congress. At dusk, while the President addressed a joint session of the Congress on the state of the nation, they hoisted 32 black-painted coffins, shouldered hundreds of placards and banners and marched on the US Embassy. Their banners attacked the "US imperialists" and their "brown brothers", "Neo-colonialism," the Macapagal Administration, the union registration law, "Parity", and the Laurel-Langley Agreement. They called for the removal of US bases from the Philippines, implementation of the 1963 Land Reform Act, and an increase in minimum wages; they accused the US Ambassador of "squid tactics" and branded the CIA and US advisers as "Communist agents". And the demonstrators carried a cardboard cut-out of Uncle Sam to which they ceremoniously set fire in front of the Embassy.

Yet observers almost universally agreed that the carefully-organised demonstration was a fiasco. Someone unknown had painted Communist symbols on the circle where the demonstrators congregated, an action which brought a flurry of charges and counter-charges. The demonstrators had to abandon their intent of marching on Congress because a number of veterans' organisations, hostile to the left-wing group, were staging their own demonstration there. At the Embassy, many of the sign-bearers put down their banners and began to melt away before they even reached the rally-point. In the crowd, mimeographed attacks on the rally organisers circulated with their own propaganda. Not long after the Embassy demonstration started, its youthful leaders, including a number from the State university, found themselves alone with the guardians of the law as soon as a light sprinkle of rain began to fall. Finally, the chief co-ordinator of the demonstration, who had announced the formation of an African-Asian-Latin American Youth Solidarity movement, admitted to the press that, as far as the three continents were concerned, his contacts thus far were limited to the Philippines. (He anticipated, however, that this movement would hold an international conference in Manila two years hence—with China as a participant.)

## The Antis and the Pros

The circumstances of this incident brought out quite clearly certain facts concerning the present troubled state of Philippine-US relations. The number of Filipinos who adopt the extreme anti-American position is insignificant and, although vocal, it lacks competent leadership. It was no doubt deliberate that University of the Philippines faculty and students rallied in front of the Embassy three days before the January 25 demonstration to demand a re-examination of certain aspects of these relations, including the bases pact; and

that they specifically disavowed the extremist demands of the later rally as well as any Communist connections. Moreover, there are sizeable interests in the Philippines which are decidedly pro-American—or who fear that any attempt to modify the *status quo* could only be detrimental to the Philippines.

But the truth is that neither the anti-Americans nor the pro-Americans represent Philippine public opinion regarding Philippine-American relations today — nor an accurate assessment of the direction in which such relations are moving. Nor will an examination of the surface irritations which have appeared lately do much to clarify the picture.

## Pilferers and the "Bomb"

The presence of foreign military personnel on the soil of a sovereign State, whether as occupiers, defenders, or instruments of an international policy, can hardly be other than a source of irritation when prolonged indefinitely. In the case of the US troops in the Philippines, the situation is aggravated because the status-of-forces agreement between the two countries dates back almost two decades, to a time when the Philippines had barely attained its independence from the United States. Both countries have recently agreed to the desirability of holding new talks on the bases agreement to bring it up to date with changed conditions, possibly along the line of the NATO formula.

The deaths of two intruders in recent incidents on US military reservations in the Philippines understandably aroused considerable indignation and spurred renewed agitation for broadening Philippine jurisdiction in criminal cases involving Philippine nationals on the bases. But against the background of the wave of violence which has swept the Philippines in recent months, the pronouncement of a leading Manila editor that US guards need to be taught the value of human life appears somewhat gratuitous. And the charge that Filipinos have been "killed like flies" on the bases — an expression used a number of times in the Manila dailies recently — is hardly borne out by the statistics: some 30 deaths have apparently been recorded since the present bases agreement took effect and, according to the report of the Secretary, the Justice Department records indicate that seven US guards (as distinguished from locally employed Filipinos) were involved in previous incidents.

Nor do the facts regarding the "bomb" incident which followed the shootings explain the current tensions, even granting that Embassy officials bungled its handling. On December 11, the US Ambassador held a background session — not for attribution — for members of the local press on security problems at the US bases. Apparently pilferage of high explosives from the bases has made the US Government an unwitting accomplice in the large-scale, illegal dynamite fishing industry in the Philippines. According to his briefing